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SOURCE Jen-min Chiao-yu, Vol II, No 2, 1950.

CHINESE WRITER SAYS CHILDREN'S BOOKS MUST BE PURGED
OF SUPERSTITIOUS AND FEUDALISTIC INFLUENCES

It is interesting to note that this article, which admits that the new books for children now being published in Communist China lack the appeal of the old-fashioned feudalistic books, such as Robinson Crusoe, Tarzan, etc., and that the Chinese children are still reading them to the detriment of their new political training, was published in the Jen-min Chiao-yu (People's Education), an official publication of the Central People's Government.

Liu Sung-t'ao (劉松濤)

In recent months, newspapers in various areas have reported several cases involving primary school students who either had their minds poisoned or were running away from home after having read stories of adventure and mystery.

For example, fascinated by comic books, four children of the Wen-hsiang Primary School in Lan-chou ran away from home, on 20 June 1950. They had with them two knives, a sword, and 2,000 yuan. They said they intended to go to O-mei Shan to learn Taoism. After wandering for several days, they were picked up in Yu-chung Hsien by their parents (Kansu Jih-pao, 2 July).

After having read Robinson Crusoe and various stories of the Robin Hood type, five fifth-grade students of the Ning-pao Primary School in Shanghai ran away to seek adventure. They pledged that they would not come home until they had made a fortune. Only because they lost their way to K'un-shan did they return to their own homes after spending a few days in An-ting (Shanghai, Chieh-fang Jih-pao, 22 April).

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Some students, such as Hu Te-ch'uan, Teng Shang-kuei, and others from the fifth grade of Hsi-lai-chih Primary School in Chungking, loved to read chivalric stories and listen to the storytelling in the public halls. This caused them to absorb a good deal of undesirable influences. Induced by Chang Chih-te, a special agent, they organized themselves into fraternities and sororities and formed a Young People's Anti-Communist Cell. Some students performed daily physical exercises in the public playground, for they believed that by doing so they could become immune to bullets. They attempted to murder members of the Liberation Army. On 26 July, the school discovered that Hu Te-ch'uan, Teng Shang-kuei, and others were absent and notified their parents immediately. Later, a thorough investigation revealed that more than 20 school children, lured by Special Agent Chang Chih-te, were on their way to Hua-ying Shan to study "military arts."

That such incidents happened in the preliberation period (which they did frequently) does not surprise anyone. But it is a cause for great concern that at this time, one year after the liberation, school children still want to study Taoism and "military arts" and want to go in search of adventures.

These things have happened as a result of the fact that we have been under the rule of imperialism and feudalism for years. The cultural activities of the people are backward. We lack modern scientific knowledge. For thousands of years we have been dominated by religious and superstitious influences. We must not underestimate these influences which are still widely prevalent among the broad masses. In fact, many student's parents believe in feudalistic superstitions; they transmit these undesirable influences directly to their children. To rid the children of these undesirable influences is a difficult task and is one of the problems confronting the people's cultural and educational system.

How do mystery-filled books for children, which are a product of feudalistic culture, exert their influences on children? They capture children's minds, because children in general are disposed to new things, are full of curiosity, great ambition, and have fertile imaginations. Furthermore, children are continuously making efforts to realize their ambitions. Obviously their ambitions could hardly be realized, since in the old society they could not even satisfy their basic daily needs. But under such circumstances, plus the influence of feudalistic and superstitious legends, various "mystery-filled books offered great temptation to the children. Let us see how children carry these influences into action. Generally speaking, most of the misled children have been leading unhappy lives. But the mystery-filled books do not prompt them to action. On the contrary, they tend to serve as escape literature for those who have to continue to lead less fortunate lives. Since our nation was liberated only recently, it has not been possible to achieve complete social and educational reforms in such a short time. But, in view of the serious nature of the influence of mystery-filled books, we must seek to solve the problem through education.

We should provide the children with reading guidance. It is a hopeful and encouraging sign that children are interested in reading books outside their school hours. Since they are not capable of judging what is good or bad, teachers should help them make selections. Children should be told what is valuable and what is poisonous. However, many teachers assume an irresponsible attitude when it comes to children's books. Thus, in many areas, including areas that have long been liberated, we can still find a great number of students who read mystery-filled books. We cannot place all the blame on the country bookstands that circulate these books. It is the responsibility of teachers to investigate all children's books, systematically recommending the good ones (some good books for children have appeared in bookstores recently) and rejecting the bad ones that contain elements of mystery and superstition.

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During classes teachers should make frequent references to outside readings to stimulate the students' interest in reading books. Several primary schools in Peiping have purchased large quantities of new books for children which are to be read and explained to students. Since students spend a good deal of time at home, where they may still be some mystery-filled books for children, teachers should make every effort to cooperate with parents. They should know what books the children read at home and advise the parents not to entertain their children with mystery-filled stories.

Since the Jen-min Jih-pao brought up the problem of the preparation of children's books last year, some progress has been made in the field. About 200 books for children containing new material have been published. This constitutes a rather sizable share of the children's books on the bookstands. For this we can thank our writers and illustrators.

However, there are still serious shortcomings. The subject matter and style are not quite appealing enough to the children; the books have not yet become books the children love to read. At present, there are fewer good books for children than there are old-fashioned ones, such as Tarzan of the Apes, Son of Tarzan, etc. Therefore, the important task still remains of writing children's books that have greater appeal for children and that will strengthen political attitudes. It is hoped that writers and illustrators of children's books will continue their efforts in this field.

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